

Enclosure 4a

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Regulations of the Board of Regents Governing Virtual Learning Education in Rhode Island



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44 DEFINITIONS

45 As used in these regulations, the following words and terms have the following meaning,
46 unless the context indicates another or different meaning or intent:

- 47 (a) Acceptable use policy (AUP) – a policy that outlines the responsibilities of students,
48 teachers, staff and others as they use the computers, software applications, and Internet
49 when using the school or district computers or internet connections. AUPs also outline
50 the consequences for failure to adhere to this policy.
- 51 (b) Asynchronous learning - communication exchanges that occur in elapsed time between
52 two or more people. Examples are email, online discussion forums, message boards,
53 blogs, podcasts, wikis, etc.
- 54 (c) Blended learning – learning opportunities in which a student learns, at least in part, at a
55 supervised brick and mortar location away from home and, at least in part, through
56 online delivery with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or
57 pace.
- 58 (d) Brick and mortar site – the physical location where teachers and students are
59 interacting and the location for some of the computers that students are using to
60 connect to the Internet and online sources.
- 61 (e) Commissioner – the commissioner of elementary and secondary education.
- 62 (f) Common Core Standards – standards adopted by a majority of states, including Rhode
63 Island, that are robust and relevant to the real world, reflect the knowledge and skills
64 that young people need for success in college and careers, and provide a consistent,
65 clear understanding of what students are expected to learn.
- 66 (g) Course – a connected series of lessons and learning experiences that:
- 67 1. Establish expectations defined by recognized standards,
68 2. Provide students with opportunities to learn and practice skills, and
69 3. Include assessments of student knowledge and skills adequate to determine
70 proficiency at the level of academic rigor required by relevant content standards.
- 71 (h) Dual Enrollment – the concurrent earning of college credits while enrolled in high
72 school.
- 73 (i) High speed broadband Internet access – infrastructure that provides connections to the
74 Internet which allows transfer of large quantities of complex digital content at sufficient
75 speeds to ensure fast and reliable delivery of data and content.
- 76 (j) Individual Learning Plans (ILP) - a planning and monitoring tool that customizes and
77 directs students' goals and development in three domains: academic, career, and
78 personal/social.
- 79 (k) Online (or distance learning) – education in which instruction and content are delivered
80 primarily over the Internet.
- 81 (l) Online courses – an “online course” is one in which more than half of the content is
82 delivered by a teacher from a different location than that of the student.

- 83 (m) Online school program – programming delivered by a school district or cooperative of
84 school districts, and provides an online, comprehensive and sequential program of
85 courses or grade-level coursework and instruction in which more than half of the
86 program is delivered online and more than half of the instruction is delivered online by
87 a teacher from a different location than that of the student.
- 88 (n) Open enrollment – students may enroll in online content and programming outside of
89 those online opportunities provided by the district of residence.
- 90 (o) Synchronous learning - Online learning in which the participants interact at the same
91 time and in the same space.
- 92 (p) Virtual learning – learning opportunities that make use of technology to enhance the
93 teaching and learning experience.
- 94

95 AUTHORITY, SCOPE AND PURPOSE

96 The Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education (Board of Regents)
97 pursuant to its delegated statutory authority under the Rhode Island General Law Chapter
98 §16-60, promulgate these Regulations of the Rhode Island Board of Regents Governing
99 Virtual Learning Education (Regulations).

100 The Board of Regents recognizes that a variety of learning options, including online courses
101 and programs, are critical for 21st Century learners. The Board of Regents also recognizes
102 that online learning provides opportunities for students to access curriculum and
103 specialized courses in a flexible learning environment that might not otherwise be
104 available.

105 The purpose of these Regulations is to establish comprehensive and coherent policies
106 governing Virtual Learning Education in Rhode Island. These Virtual Learning Education
107 Regulations promote and support customized learning experiences for all learners through
108 quality and engaging online content and programs and by allowing learners some element
109 of control over the time, place, pace, and path of their learning.

110 These Regulations will help ensure that future technologies and innovative online learning
111 activities can be integrated into existing practices in ways that continue to empower both
112 educators and learners. The Virtual Learning Education Regulations are framed around
113 four regulatory principles: 1) All learners in Rhode Island will have access to high quality,
114 rigorous, and relevant online learning opportunities; 2) virtual learning education in Rhode
115 Island will support all learners in meeting academic and career goals; 3) Rhode Island will
116 support reliable access to the Internet and technology tools necessary for virtual learning;
117 and 4) the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) will coordinate these Virtual
118 Learning Education Regulations with policies developed by higher education institutions
119 and other state agencies.

120 **1.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

121 **2.1 RIDE Responsibilities and Functions**

122 The responsibilities of RIDE include but are not limited to:

- 123 1) Ensuring that existing and future state policies do not limit or prohibit students
124 from engaging in online learning opportunities;
- 125 2) Ensuring open enrollment for all learners to provide greater access to quality
126 online content;
- 127 3) Promoting state policies to support a move to competency-based learning;
- 128 4) Reviewing and communicating the national standards that will guide the
129 development or purchase of quality online content, instruction and
130 programming;
- 131 5) Providing information to the educational community relating to online learning
132 content, instruction, programming and other online resources;
- 133 6) Promoting flexible student funding that supports access to online learning
134 opportunities;

- 7) Supporting statewide efforts to ensure adequate resources for bandwidth and infrastructure; and
- 8) Supporting opportunities for statewide efficiencies to increase access to technology and online learning.

2.2 LEA Responsibilities and Functions

LEAs shall support student engagement in a variety of online learning opportunities such as online courses or online programs suitable for meeting the unique learning needs of individual students. Responsibilities of LEAs include but are not limited to:

- 1) Ensuring that all online content is rigorous, of high quality, and aligned to adopted state and LEA standards;
- 2) Ensuring appropriate placement of students in online learning programs or courses;
- 3) Communicating the criteria and procedures for enrolling and remaining enrolled in online learning opportunities;
- 4) Communicating to students and parents or guardians acceptable online course work that will meet state and local graduation requirements;
- 5) Clearly identify online coursework opportunities that meet post-secondary, college, or military enrollment requirements;
- 6) Ensuring the safety of all students in the online environment by adopting and upholding acceptable use and internet safety policies or protocols; and
- 7) Creating and adopting a local virtual learning policy that provides all students with access to online learning and that clearly communicates all of the above and any other LEA procedures related to virtual learning education.

Recognition of virtual learning opportunities as fulfilling coursework graduation requirements is a local decision and shall be predicated on alignment to state adopted standards and other relevant national and industry standards. Local graduation policies must not limit access or prohibit approved online coursework from fulfilling graduation requirements.

2.0 CUSTOMIZED LEARNING

2.1 Personalized learning opportunities

Technology can address the issues of relevance and engagement by providing a highly personalized learning experience that builds upon learning styles, interests, and abilities and allows students to work at their own pace.

2.1.1 Individual Learning Plans

The Regents Secondary Regulations, the Basic Education Program, and the Regents Career and Technical Regulations require all students to engage in the development of learning plans that reflect his or her academic and career goals. Individual Learning Plans are designed to help each student reach his or her academic and career goals. Quality online learning allows students to meet these goals through a wide variety of courses, instructional strategies, curriculum, and relevant content. LEAs shall utilize appropriate

technology and online learning opportunities to help student achieve their goals and prepare them for success in college and careers..

2.1.2 Elements of student control

All learners should be given the opportunity to choose a learning experience that supports their learning style and allows them to progress at their own pace. Technology and online learning programs provide students with some control over their learning because they can engage in online content anytime, anywhere and can progress through the content at their own rate. LEA virtual learning policies shall provide some level of flexibility for student choice and shall allow for students to demonstrate achievement in self-paced online coursework based on proficiency level rather than seat time.

2.2 Online delivery models

Digital learning programs can be offered synchronously and/or asynchronously to customize the learning environment that meets learner needs and learning styles. The level of teacher involvement in these programs varies as well with teachers playing supporting roles in some courses and taking more direct instructional roles in others.

2.2.1 Role of educators

The role of teachers and the level of teacher involvement with their students vary depending on the delivery model in use. In the blended learning classroom, the roles of teachers and students are often quite similar to their roles in a traditional classroom. As learning becomes more student-centered, the roles of teachers and students often change and teachers become facilitators of learning and students gain some control and choice over their learning experiences. Instructional technologies and quality online content enable educators to develop customized learning experiences for students.

2.2.2 Spectrum of delivery models

There are several models for delivery of online learning ranging from blended learning models that integrate online learning with face-to-face instruction in a brick and mortar school to fully online learning experiences. These regulations do not limit the use of other models for online learning. LEAs retain the flexibility to choose appropriate online delivery models.

Blended learning occurs in a variety of venues and models and may incorporate online content in the form of a lesson, a single course, or an entire curriculum. A blended classroom or course provides flexibility and availability of programming that expands learning beyond the day or school year. In a blended learning environment, teachers facilitate students' learning with direct instruction.

Virtual charter schools represent a more extensive online learning experience where students may complete most of their course work online at locations other than a school building. Virtual charter schools may also allow students to complete all required coursework online.

217 The intent of these Regulations is to ensure that all students have access to quality online
218 learning opportunities and to support LEAs in their role of identifying the online learning
219 activities that best meets each student's needs and goals.

220 **2.3 Access and Opportunity**

221 The advent of digital learning requires investments in computer hardware, communication
222 networks, and technical support services. Decisions regarding spending on infrastructure
223 and quality content at both the state and LEA level shall be made with these needs in mind,
224 ensuring access to quality online learning for all learners.

225 **2.3.1 Access to quality content, instruction and programming**

226 LEAs shall have flexibility to make decisions regarding the development, adoption or
227 purchase of quality online content and programming based on local data and information
228 about student needs. Section 4.0 contains details regarding quality assurance for content,
229 instruction and programming.

230 **2.3.2 24/7 access**

231 Online learning opportunities provide the flexibility necessary for instruction and learning
232 to occur anytime and anywhere. Providing anytime, anywhere access to online coursework
233 will meet the needs of students who, for a variety of reasons, may not be able to "fit" their
234 learning into a traditional school schedule. Local policy shall not prevent student access to
235 quality online learning that occurs both within and outside of the traditional school setting.

236 **3.0 QUALITY ASSURANCE**

237 Learners in Rhode Island are assured access to quality instruction and learning
238 opportunities through these Virtual Learning Education Regulations as well as, the Rhode
239 Island Basic Education Program, the Regents Secondary Regulations, Regulations of the
240 Board of Regents Governing Career and Technical Education in Rhode Island, the Rhode
241 Island Teaching Standards and the Education Evaluation Program. The Regents Regulations
242 for Virtual Learning Education will complement and enhance existing regulations by
243 promoting students access to quality online learning opportunities as part of each student's
244 pathway.

245 Nationally recognized, research-based standards and best policy and practices will form
246 the basis of RIDE developed guidance to LEAs and other educational organizations to
247 ensure the quality of online content, instruction and programming.

248 RIDE shall regularly review and revise guidance documents as necessary to reflect
249 promising practices and technology advances and innovations.

250 **3.1 Content**

251 Online content is the high quality academic material delivered through technology. It is
252 what students learn and ranges from new engaging, interactive software to classic
253 literature delivered through video lectures and games.

254 All content whether online or in print must be aligned to common state standards, national
255 and/or technical standards. Online content shall be evaluated for effectiveness and LEAs

seeking to adopt online content should require data on the effectiveness of that content including information such as student completion and achievement. Locally developed content must be aligned to state adopted standards and should follow nationally recognized standards for quality online content.

3.2 Instruction

To ensure that teachers are effective in supporting student success in online learning opportunities, whether through a blended learning model or a completely online model, teachers must be knowledgeable in online instructional strategies and pedagogy. Technology and online resources provide tools to support teachers in developing engaging, relevant and customized learning opportunities. Training and professional development opportunities focused on effective online instructional strategies and pedagogy through a coordinated K-12 and higher education effort are critical to better prepare teachers to support students in online learning environments.

Virtual Learning Education guidance documents will provide educators and administrators with national models of teacher training and preparation programs that are effective in preparing teachers for online learning.

3.3 Programming

It is expected that LEAs will embrace new technologies and virtual learning opportunities to develop innovative blended learning models. As LEAs develop online learning programs, they shall utilize nationally recognized best practices such as those included in RIDE Virtual Learning Education guidance. Development of effective programs will include at a minimum descriptions of online program leadership, instruction, content, student support services and evaluation for effectiveness. Program design considerations must be made to ensure equity and access.

4.0 SYSTEMIC SUPPORTS FOR VIRTUAL LEARNING EDUCATION

These Regulations seek to promote collaboration with higher education and state agencies to establish connected and coherent statewide policies. Higher education, cross agency and business partnerships can more effectively secure sufficient resources to ensure necessary technology infrastructure and to promote virtual learning opportunities for all learners in Rhode Island.

4.1 Statewide policy

Building a high quality education system is an investment in the future of all Rhode Island students and in the future of Rhode Island's economy. Virtual Learning Education is a long-term strategy that will support a quality education system, preparing students for post secondary education and successful entry into the workforce. The development of a coherent statewide system for online learning will require a coordinated statewide effort with higher education and other state agencies.

These Regulations authorize the Commissioner to coordinate RIDE's efforts with higher education and other state agencies to ensure the establishment of coherent statewide

295 virtual learning policies and to promote collaborations that result in efficiencies of scale
296 that support those policies.

297 **4.2 Resourcing, support, coordination, and articulation**

298 The potential and inevitable impact of online learning across K-12, adult education, higher
299 education, and workforce development necessitates that resources and supports be
300 coordinated across the state.

301 The Commissioner shall ensure that RIDE continues to seek new and innovative funding
302 solutions to ensure all learners have access to quality online content.

303 The Commissioner shall ensure that RIDE participates in statewide efforts to support
304 Virtual Learning Education with a focus on ensuring all students have access to quality
305 online learning opportunities and ensuring efficiencies gained by coordinating resources.

306 Coordinated statewide efforts can ensure purchasing power to maintain necessary
307 infrastructure and acquire regular upgrades and negotiated lower costs for devices and
308 online content and programming.

309 Publicly available information regarding quality providers will support educators,
310 administrators, families and students make informed judgments about online content and
311 programs. This information must be coordinated between RIDE and higher education to
312 ensure that families and students are aware of acceptable course work that meets both
313 graduation requirements and higher education acceptance and dual enrollment credit
314 recognition.

315 The Commissioner shall ensure that RIDE coordinates its efforts with higher education, the
316 legislature, and other key stakeholders to ensure the development of a comprehensive
317 statewide policy framework and to coordinate resources focused on providing all learners
318 access to quality online learning opportunities.